

January 24, 2017

Dear Members of the Award Committee:

We write to nominate Dr. Nassim Jafarinaimi for the CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award. Dr. Jafarinaimi is a designer and researcher investigating how design studies articulates with civic engagement and informal learning. Dr. Jafarinaimi graduated from Georgia Tech with an MS in Digital Media in 2003 and, after receiving her PhD from Carnegie Mellon University (School of Design), joined us as a visiting instructor (2007-2011) and visiting assistant professor (2012-2013). Following a competitive national search, we hired her as assistant professor in 2013. Dr. Jafarinaimi is an ideal candidate for the CETL/BP award because she is a true innovator at the crossroads of science, technology, and the arts who crafts learning experiences that combine theory with practice and provide students with learning opportunities that extend from the traditional classroom to real world contexts.

Since joining our School as a tenure-line professor in 2013, Dr. Jafarinaimi has made significant contributions to LMC course offerings. At the undergraduate level, she has taught LMC 3705 ("Principles of Information Design") and LMC 3206 ("Communication and Design"), and at the graduate level LMC 6311 ("Visual Culture and Design") and six Project Studios at the 6000 and 8000 level and on topics including "Designing Conversational Media," "Participatory Strategies in Design," and "Interaction Design and Civic Media." Her seminars offer excellent opportunities for students to apply various methodologies and theories to real-life situations, and her collaborating partners have included the Mayo Clinic, the Center for Mental Health Policy and Services Research at the University of Pennsylvania, the Fulton County Department of Health & Wellness, and the Marcus Autism Center in Atlanta. Dr. Jafarinaimi's impressive advising record (she has been serving on more than ten MS and PhD committees), and her student evaluations attest to a steadily increasing teaching effectiveness: In 2013 these evaluations range from 3.8 through 4.7; in 2014 from 4.6 through 4.9; in 2015, from 4.8 through 5.0, and are thus at or above other highly performing tenure-line faculty in LMC. Dr. Jafarinaimi's pedagogical excellence has also been recognized in the form of a Best Digital Media Master's Thesis Award for one of her graduate advisees and GT Journey Challenge Awards for two of her undergraduate teams.

Dr. Jafarinaimi's accomplishments also include the development of two award-winning new learning experiences. In 2016 she received an internal award from the IAC Digital Integrative Liberal Arts Center (DILAC) to begin a new teaching project in which she weaves together an advanced theory course on social justice with an advanced studio class. The new hybrid course resulting from this provides undergraduate and graduate students from across the Georgia Tech campus with the opportunity to better understand the relevance of humanistic inquiry on design engineering as they partner with the APEX Museum of African-American history on design projects oriented to the history of Atlanta. Elsewhere, Dr. Jafarinaimi has received a GT Fire Award to fund her "Particles in a Box" project, in which she collaborates with faculty from the College of Engineering and undergraduate students from across campus to design games and other educational experiences that will help undergraduate engineering students better understand the import of quantum mechanics on their chosen discipline. This project has enabled Dr. Jafarinaimi's students to author and present papers in prestigious venues, and has led to the development of an educational game that received the Students' Choice Award at the

Interservice/Industry Training, Simulation, and Education Conference's Serious Games Competition. Given her unique talent for breathing new life into already-established courses and developing equally innovative new ones, it is no surprise that Dr. Jafarinaimi received, in addition to her many other accolades, the 2016 IAC Teacher of the Year Award.

As the attached letters of support illustrate, students appreciate both Dr. Jafarinaimi's empathetic teaching methods and genuine accessibility. DM alumna Michelle Partogi writes that Dr. Jafarinaimi structures classes to encompass both theory and practice in "the most effective way I've encountered during my educational career: [by forging] research collaborations with service organizations.... [Her] influence has shown me that the real world is messy and riddled with politics—yet rigid boundaries can be challenged. She cultivates her students' mastery of rhetoric so that we may have our own voices heard and our own visions realized." As CM alum Stephen Song puts it, Dr. Jafarinaimi's "class is what made me want to pursue design as a career" because she "engaged with us like we [were] emerging professionals—genuinely eager to improve our work and deserving of respect as adults." And as DM alum Brighton Vino Jegarajan explains, "Despite geographical distances, she continues to be one of my 'go-to' people for design and career advice.... The values [I learned from her] continue to enhance me and my work every day." For her students, then, Dr. Jafarinaimi's ability to connect theory with practice, facilitate productive critique sessions, and model the intellectual and ethical standards she expects of her students has been central to their success at Georgia Tech and beyond.

LMC faculty members also recognize Dr. Jafarinaimi's commitment to a pedagogical practice that balances rigor with accessibility. As Dr. Janet Murray, Professor of Digital Media and IAC Associate Dean for Research concludes in her written evaluation of Dr. Jafarinaimi's teaching:

I was impressed by the productive nature of the conversation throughout, the clear design guidance, the active participation of the students, the depth of the syllabus... Nassim was modeling design process, and providing both conceptual knowledge and specific technical craft in ways that were excellent preparation for both research in digital media design and also for professional work.

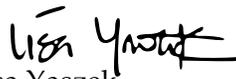
LMC professor Dr. Anne Pollock makes similar points in her own letter of support, noting that Dr. Jafarinaimi's classroom practice is characterized by a tone "that perfectly [balances] serious with openness." She also praises Dr. Jafarinaimi's ability to design courses that help students understand "the ways in which questions of visual culture and design... open up new routes into the exploration of fundamental questions of value and politics." As such, Dr. Jafarinaimi's pedagogical practice articulates neatly with the mission of LMC, the Ivan Allen College, and Georgia Tech to produce graduates who will be leaders at the intersection of science, technology, and the arts.

Taken together then, Dr. Jafarinaimi's commitment to pedagogical excellence, her innovative teaching methods, and the clear impact that she has had on her students' lives make her an outstanding candidate for the CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award. If you would like to discuss her nomination further, we can be reached by email at [richard.utz@lmc.gatech.edu](mailto:richard.utz@lmc.gatech.edu) and [lisa.yaszek@lmc.gatech.edu](mailto:lisa.yaszek@lmc.gatech.edu).

Sincerely,



Richard Utz  
Professor and Chair



Lisa Yaszek  
Professor and Associate Chair

## **Statement of Teaching Philosophy**

**Nassim JafariNaimi, Ph.D.**

**School of Literature, Media, and Communication**

My approach to teaching is informed by my scholarly research in design studies engaged with the interrelated themes of democracy, participation, and informal learning. Moreover, my background in diverse disciplines including mathematics and engineering; art and design; and humanities and social sciences has exposed me to diverse ways of teaching. Based on the above, my teaching has three distinct features: engaging with problems in real world settings, integrating theory and practice-based engagements, and fostering learning communities that extend teaching beyond the classroom. In addition, I believe that students learn best when they see teachers invested in them as individuals, thus I always strive to connect with each and every one of my students at the personal level.

I am deeply committed to creating opportunities for students to solve problems set in real-world contexts. Employing this strategy enables students to see how their learning is relevant to contemporary problems and enables a grounded understanding of the social, political, and organizational aspects of their future professional practice. This strategy also stimulates students' curiosities, motivating them to push their projects beyond classroom requirements. For example, all my advanced studio courses are organized around real-world problem solving and research activities in collaboration with non-profit organizations. These projects are carefully selected to teach the necessary skills for professional design practice, such as generative research and ideation, visualization, prototyping, evaluation, and presentation of design concepts. These projects are closely supervised through weekly critique sessions by myself and outside clients to provide students with individual and group feedback. Most recently my classes have worked on problems set by organizations such as Marcus Autism Center; Center for Mental Health Policy and Services Research at the University of Pennsylvania (CMPHSR); and the Knowledge and Evaluation Research (KER) Unit at the Mayo Clinic. For example, for the past three semesters my students have worked on designing decision-aid tools used in clinical encounters to help patients and doctors decide on treatment options that is best for them. Because of these class engagements, CMPHSR and KER have sponsored MS projects of two graduate students that I advised last year. One of the MS students working with CMPHSR went on to receive the best MS project award in May 2016. I am similarly committed to creating real world opportunities for undergraduate students. For example, I have adapted undergraduate class projects to align with the GT Convergence Innovation Competition such as the GT Journey Challenge which allowed students to create and develop interactive concepts to solve real problems; work in multidisciplinary teams; develop business cases; and present their work to clients and industry partners who provided feedback. Two of the participating groups from my classes have won this campus-wide competition.

Another key characteristic of my courses is the integration of theory and practice. Research has shown that students learn best when they can see the relevance of theory to their everyday and professional practices. Thus my theoretical courses are accompanied with practical assignments so students can see the significance of theories; and my practice based courses are always guided by close readings of selected texts that help students contextualize their activity in the larger discourse of disciplines that inform their practice. For example, one my undergraduate courses that draws many students from engineering disciplines is titled *Communication and Culture*, a theoretical course that examines communication along technological, social, political, and cultural dimensions. Building on the pluralism of classic and contemporary communication theories, I engage students with the diverse philosophic understandings of communication and their implications for action and practice. Students solidify their learning through critical analysis of communication artifacts such as advertisements, visualizations, and physical artifacts, culminating in a design exercise that challenges them to re-think and re-imagine these artifacts drawing on the theoretical foundation set in the course.

I believe strongly in creating learning environments where students can shape their own communities and learn through interaction with peers including those from other disciplines or levels. Toward this aim, I have established the *Design and Social Interaction Studio*, a research group and physical space aimed at bringing

students from a multiplicity of disciplines to collaborate around shared projects. It is my policy to welcome students from all disciplines and levels to participate in group meetings and research projects. Some students move to take leadership roles in these projects; others make voluntary contributions based on their interests or skills they wish to learn. For example, one of my current collaborative research projects with faculty in the College of Engineering involves designing games and interactive visualizations for teaching Quantum Mechanics (QM). This project, funded in part by a GT FIRE award for teaching and the basis for an NSF application on improving undergraduate engineering education (under review), currently involves 16 volunteers and has included more than 25 undergraduate and graduate students from colleges of engineering, computing, design and liberal arts since its inception three years ago. In this space, I facilitate a learning community around this (and other) research project by encouraging collaborative activities that help students take initiative and ownership for their work, such as provision of opportunities for them to publish and present their work in scholarly and public venues. This research has led to an educational game that received the Students' Choice Award at the Serious Games Competition, at the Interservice/Industry Training, Simulation, and Education Conference (I/ITSEC). Moreover, both undergraduate and graduate students have authored papers and presented in prestigious conference venues as part of their involvement with research projects in this space. I further encourage them to use the space to meet up, work on projects together, and complete recommended activities such as watching documentaries related to my courses. These strategies have proven particularly successful both for building a learning community amongst students and encouraging them to take initiative beyond course requirements.

I also strongly believe that students learn best when they see teachers genuinely invested in their success and growth. I strive to connect with each and every one of my students at a personal level to better understand and guide them towards their individual goals by aligning my teaching with their learning styles and aspirations. For example, I always set aside time to meet with students individually multiple times during a semester so we can together discuss their progress in the class and set individualized goals.

Building on the success of above strategies, I won an internal award from the IAC Digital Integrative Liberal Arts Center (DILAC) to assess whether and how the integration of a theory course with a studio course focused on humanities and design might impact students' approaches to problem solving and their long-term trajectories. As part of this research, I am aligning an advanced theory course titled *Critical Theory, Social Justice, and Philosophy of Design* with an advanced studio titled, *Sweet Auburn: Birthplace of Ideas*. The theory course engages theories of social justice as they relate to the design of technologies both digital and non-digital. These theories are put to work in the studio course as students trace their relationship to the design of the built environment in and around Atlanta, specifically the Sweet Auburn Historic District. Students work on design projects in collaboration with community partners such as the APEX museum of African-American history. The courses include undergraduate, MS and PhD students from multiple disciplines at Georgia Tech inclusive of Colleges of Computing, Design, Liberal Arts, and Business all of whom have committed to taking both courses concurrently. An external STEM evaluation consulting firm will be conducting formal evaluations of these courses assessing their impact on multiple dimensions such students' sense of creative self-efficacy, enhanced understanding of the relevance and value of the humanities on design and engineering, and increased tendency and intention to seek out interdisciplinary collaboration. It is my aim to publish the results of this educational innovation across humanities and engineering in 2018.

Much like design, teaching is a practice with its own strategies, methods, and techniques that evolve with experience. My teaching experience in the past eight years has given me an opportunity to develop my skills in theory and practice-based courses. My teaching has been recognized by awards for innovation in education such as GT FIRE and DILAC as well as the Ivan Allen College Best Teacher award. It also manifests in my students' successes such as best MS thesis award, winning in competitions such as Convergence, and successful careers. I am committed to continuing the pursuit of the art of teaching, with the aim of creating learning environments that foster students' intellectual and emotional growth, empowering them to contribute effectively in areas that they find personally worthwhile and meaningful.

## **Student Statements regarding Dr. JafariNaimi's Teaching**

### *Selected CIOS Comments*

#### ***Principles of Interaction Design (Undergraduate Level)***

- The teacher had great knowledge of the course material, enthusiasm to teach, and willingness to adapt the class if necessary for the benefit of the students.
- I learned A LOT about the design process, especially through our more hands on projects. In fact, I landed a really awesome internship this semester, and I think I can directly credit this course with giving me the knowledge I needed to make it through that process.
- The in class discussion, especially the feedback over projects was exceptional.
- Professor Nassim prioritizes feedback and promotes individual growth by engaging the class in the feedback process.
- Great enthusiasm for the subject and a lot of knowledge. Was also extremely friendly and often able to get interesting discussions going.
- Great project breadth and variety kept interest and learning both at a premium.
- The ability to work in groups to build a product/prototype. The CIC competition was a great experience for me, because it opened my eyes to how I could go about building a design or idea into a product.

#### ***Communication and Culture (Undergraduate Level)***

- Diverse background that gave her interesting perspective on material to share.
- Powerful and stimulating lectures.
- Overall a great course. Very interesting material and the structure of the class felt more personal than most. I like that we touched on many ideas that hopefully opened up the minds of the students to step outside of their usual bubble and really look at different cultures.
- Passion for subject, ability to facilitate discussion around subject in an interesting way, very understanding of students.
- The material. The readings, videos, podcasts were well chosen

#### ***Principles of Information Design (Undergraduate Level)***

- The projects were very thought-provoking. I spent a lot of time with brainstorming and iterations and really learned a lot about the design process.
- I liked that we were challenged to do more, to step outside boundaries and we received meaningful feedback
- Critique sessions were really helpful in seeing where to improve and also how to view my own work
- We were able to work together and give each other feedback and critique which was very helping.
- I loved the people in the class and the opportunity to have a small community in which we could get substantial critique on our work.
- I really learned a lot of practical skills and information from this course that I am sure to use for the rest of my life.
- The class and the work done was meaningful. [...] This class was about making sense of the theories and applying them. Also great class structure and way of adapting teaching to what is appropriate at the according moment.
- I really appreciated the 1-on-1 feedback. Not many teachers do that, so it was refreshing to hear something personalized rather than just a letter grade.
- The professor had the ability to be tough and honest with her critiques but also genuine about her compliments. She critiqued the work in such a way that pushed us to stress and work harder but not in a way that made us feel bad about ourselves. She always found something honestly positive to say about the work as well, which was encouraging.
- Nassim cares - simple as that. She cares about the subject and her students. She is enthusiastic about what she does and what we do, [...]

#### ***Visual Culture and Design (Graduate Level)***

- Her energy and interest in the topic is quite incredible. She really did get me very interested in a lot of the topics.
- Ability to convey difficult material easily.
- Passion for the subject. Amazing enthusiasm and the energy she brings to the class.
- Enthusiasm about the content and engagement of students into theories and detail of design

- Providing students with opportunities to design projects for real-world clients.
- She is really passionate about the course and tries to find ways to make the subject matter really appealing to her students.
- The takeaways always were so powerful that I impacted my work in other course in a really really good way.
- She pushed us to be creative.
- Enthusiasm about the content and engagement of students into theories and detail of design.

**Project Studio (Graduate Level)**

- Readings in class are a must for every design student. Her continuous focus on using language carefully to describe opinions and thoughts is a very important takeaway from the class. You can learn a lot just by observing her.
- I really enjoyed the projects. It was great that we had meeting with people from the industry. Also, it was very helpful when the instructor helped us break down analyze the reading materials. The instructor taught complicated things in a very clear manner and it was easy to follow and understand once she explained it.
- She has a way of extracting out of every student. Kudos to her dedication to students.
- I really learnt a lot from the class critique sessions. Working for a real client was a great experience.
- The highly informed and collaborative responses enveloped in a manner that encouraged thought and group discussion without putting any one on the defensive or "down" as some teachers like to do or do without hesitation.
- Nassim is incredibly respectful of everyone in the class. I appreciated how she took the opportunity with this class to focus on helping us grow as women entering the field. An early discussion designated the class as a place to fail, grow, and learn.
- The instructor was very encouraging but at the same time showed us where there was room for improvement.
- The project was challenging and interesting and I feel I learnt a lot out of it.
- The breakdown the readings, the design critiques, interacting with a live client.
- Great class! One of the best I've taken here at GT.
- Was very effective in facilitating discussion and allowing students to participate freely. Also, very clear during critiques about our strengths AND weaknesses.
- The critiques were extremely constructive to the point where we were also able to self-critique so that we could learn and improve.

**Course Surveys (CIOS)**  
**Nassim JafariNaimi**

**Item 10: Considering everything, the instructor was an effective teacher**

TERM	YEAR	COURSE			CLASS SIZE	5: strongly agree	4	3	2	1: strongly disagree	N/A	NO. OF RESP.	INTER-POLATED MEDIAN	NORMATIVE DATA (per class size -- see notes)	
														GT median	IAC median
Spring	2016	LMC	6311	NJ2	12	11	0	1	0	0	0	12	4.95	4.50	4.75
Spring	2016	LMC	6650	NJ	9	7	0	0	0	1	0	8	4.93	4.50	4.75
Fall	2015	LMC	6650	NJ	7	6	0	0	0	0	0	6	5.00	4.50	4.75
Spring	2015	LMC	3705	TN	12	12	0	0	0	0	0	12	5.00	4.50	4.75
Spring	2015	LMC	6650	NJ	10	7	0	0	0	0	0	7	5.00	4.50	4.75
Spring	2015	LCC	4699	A	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5.00	4.50	4.75
Spring	2014	LCC	6311	0	12	7	3	1	0	0	0	11	4.70	4.50	4.75
Fall	2014	LMC	3705	TN	11	6	2	3	0	0	0	11	4.60	4.50	4.75
Fall	2014	LMC	6650	NJ	12	9	2	0	0	0	0	11	4.90	4.50	4.75
Fall	2013	LCC	3206	D	32	7	13	2	2	3	0	27	4.00	4.33	4.60
		Combined CS 4770/6770			16*										
Spring	2013	CS	4770	A	4	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	4.00	4.50	4.75
Spring	2013	CS	6770	A	12	5	3	0	0	0	0	8	4.70	4.50	4.75
Spring	2013	LCC	3710	N	24	7	8	7	0	0	1	22	4.00	4.33	4.60
Spring	2013	LCC	6340	AR	7	0	3	1	0	0	0	4	3.80	4.50	4.75
		Combined LCC 3710			34*										
Fall	2012	LCC	3710	D	11	6	2	0	1	0	0	9	4.80	4.50	4.75
Fall	2012	LCC	3710	N	23	9	6	2	1	0	0	18	4.50	4.44	4.60

**Notes:**

Class Size Ranges: (< 16), (16 - 35), (36 - 99), (> 99)

\* Asterisk indicates normative data that uses the overall class size of all course sections

January 19, 2017

Re: Recommendation of Nassim JafariNaimi for CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award

I am pleased to have the opportunity to write in support of a CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award for Nassim JafariNaimi. I had the pleasure of observing her teach a graduate class as part of her third-year evaluation and I have also visited several project report meetings of her classes since then. Nassim has a reputation among the students and her colleagues for a deep commitment to teaching, high standards for student projects, and innovative approaches that combine real-world problems with rigorous design practice.

I was particularly impressed and moved by my formal observation of her class LMC 6650 Project Studio, a key building block of the Digital Media graduate program, offered by all faculty members in versions that reflect their differing research interests. The course allows graduate students to work in small teams on well-formed design problems. The course plays an important role in preparing MS students, who are only here for two years with current technical practices and active design skills, and in providing a research context for some PhD students as well. Establishing a successful Project Studio course involves striking a balance between one's own research goals and the varying skills and learning styles of the students. I have seen other junior and senior faculty struggle to find the right balance, but Nassim's course could serve as an ideal model.

Nassim structured the course around creating a digital tool, in collaboration with the Mayo Clinic, to empower patients by scaffolding doctor-patient communication over choice of medicine, allowing patients to compare medicines based on several criteria that may vary individually. This was an excellent focus for the course, because it was a real-life situation with understandable user needs that elicited the compassion of the students, making it easy for them to concretize the end-user situation. In my more detailed formal report on my visit I noted the clear organization of the syllabus, good use of whiteboard and powerpoint projection, clear division of the course into coherent segments of the semester, and disciplined time-management of the division of the 3 hour meeting into discrete and well-focused subsections.

During the part of the class devoted to student reports, Nassim gave assertive but reassuring feedback on student designs, empowering students to offer constructive criticism of one another's presentations. All the students seemed engaged and actively offered constructive critiques. Nassim kept control of the discourse, offering specific corrections with clarity, explaining her thinking, while remaining open to opposing suggestions and very skillfully and tactfully inviting students to offer their own solutions and to bring up their own issues. I was particularly impressed with her successful strategies for pushing weaker students to better solutions without intimidating them with criticism. She often repeated students' contributions to affirm them and made clear when an issue should remain open in order to be resolved by user testing. When students stumbled in offering suggestions she repeated what they said while gently clarifying the point. Before moving on she would ask "Any other thoughts?" in way that was genuinely inviting and generally provoked additional design insights. At the same time, the class clearly understood the basis of her own judgments and were given many specific insights on how to improve their work. I particularly liked the way her meticulous visual design sense was explicitly linked to cultural values, such as her calling attention to the link between "clean" visual design and the value of "trustworthiness" in their medical design space.

One of the challenges of teaching a project-based course is integrating conceptual readings, and in a humanities-based program the pedagogical problems are even more challenging because humanistic discourse favors open-ended thinking but design requires making specific choices. I was impressed by the complexity of the theoretical issues Nassim introduced while still grounding them in specific design strategies. The third hour of the class meeting was devoted to theoretical reading. Her choice of the week's reading was quite original, a work of literary criticism in which the influential critic Wayne Booth considers the basis of literary judgments of two social issue films and how they can differ among people and over time. Nassim was taking on the key question of whether all design judgments are relative, and whether changing or divergent judgments call into question the authority of design principles. The discussion was contextualized by

notations on the whiteboard on a grid of major theorists (Goffman, Dewey, Shannon & Weaver) that students referred to with confidence. Students were consistently active in the theoretical discussion, both in response to specific leading questions by Nassim (“What does Booth say about the role of comparison?”) and in bringing in their own related experiences, such as readings from other classes or practices in their own design thinking. She called particular attention to examining the ways in which one’s principles of design could change, and invited the students to experience their anxiety over this possibility and to work through it conceptually, using multiple specific design examples. Nassim also brought in the changing context of critique from the Mayo Clinic researchers who were participants in the Project Studio work, and from participatory design. She reminded students that “We may have a tool that is beautiful in the context of our class but that in practice takes away from the interchange between doctor and patient.” Students responded to this conversation by recalling their own changing evaluations after user testing.

Nassim’s energy and expertise held the class’s attention throughout both the student presentations and the theoretical discussion. Students clearly felt at ease with one another and with the instructor and the tone of the discussion was focused, cordial, and intellectually challenging. I was struck by the fact that two particular students seemed to be performing in this class at a significantly higher level of design sophistication – both in practice and critique – than they had in my own classes, which I attributed to Nassim’s skill in guiding them through theory and practice, with a well-structured framework and a highly accessible manner.

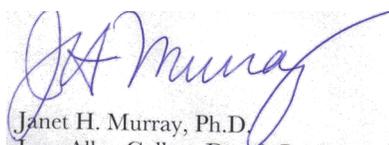
In short, I was impressed by the productive nature of the conversation throughout, the clear design guidance, the active participation of the students, the depth of the syllabus. It was a disciplined, structured environment that supported creative solutions and emphasized iterative design and articulation of design goals. Nassim was modeling design process, and providing both conceptual knowledge and specific technical craft in ways that were excellent preparation for both research in digital media design and also for professional work.

In the past year I attended presentations of her students in the core MS course in Visual Culture and Design, which Nassim devoted to a project in the Sweet Auburn district, involving neighborhood stakeholders, and producing an impressive set of strategies for making the rich history of that district more visible.

I am impressed with the way she has built a sustained relationship with community members that is providing the scaffolding for numerous productive design experiences for her students, including a new initiative that has received an internal DILAC (Digital Integrated Liberal Arts Center) award from the Dean’s Mellon grant. This course is particularly innovative, and represents a model that may well be the future of education, since it combines theory and practice in a project-centered design task that involves PhD, MS, and UG students from across the Institute.

Georgia Tech’s Digital Media graduate program was one of the first world-wide and remains a leader in the field and one of the few that combines theory and practice from a humanistic perspective. Nassim JafariNaimi’s teaching is an ideal model for what such an approach offer. She would therefore be a very appropriate recipient of the CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award.

Sincerely,



Janet H. Murray, Ph.D.  
Ivan Allen College Dean’s Professor  
Graduate Program in Digital Media  
Associate Dean for Research  
Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts  
Georgia Tech

January 23, 2017

To the award committee,

I am delighted to write a letter in support of the nomination of Nassim JafariNaimi for the CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award. It is an award that I myself received when I was a junior faculty member, and having had the pleasure of observing Nassim in the classroom, I feel privileged to be in a position to recommend the recognition of an extraordinarily worthy colleague.

I had the opportunity to observe Nassim's teaching last year, in her graduate-level class called Visual Culture and Design. I was very impressed by the creative way that the course was conceptualized. She was teaching design fundamentals with a distinctive framing paradigm: articulations of civil rights and social justice, here in Atlanta's Auburn Avenue and beyond. The course's thematic focus helped to underscore ways in which questions of visual culture and design need not be limited to low-stakes commercial concerns, but can open up new routes into the exploration of fundamental questions of values and politics. The project that the students were working on involved creating compositions drawing on text from the Maya Angelou poem "Still I Rise." From their works in progress, I could see that this was a brilliant way to attend to relationships between words and meaning, form and content. This exemplified Nassim's commitment as a teacher to help her students increase both their technical proficiency and their analytical sophistication.

In this observation, I was also impressed by the way that Nassim facilitated rigorous peer critique. Even though it was early in the semester, the students displayed both a budding facility with analytical tools and an excellent collective rapport. Because of the careful way that Nassim set up the critique, none of the students were defensive, and instead the conversation was characterized by high levels of engagement, openness, and a sense of humor. Nassim gave students feedback that intertwined concrete and practical advice with theoretically engaged broader points. The students were learning to look critically, a skill that is vital for would-be designers but extraordinarily difficult to teach.

I have also had two opportunities to observe Nassim teaching my own students, since she gives a guest lecture each year in my graduate class, the Core Seminar in Science, Technology, and Society. That class is designed to simultaneously introduce students to key concepts in the interdisciplinary field of Science, Technology, and Society (STS), and to introduce them to faculty across the Ivan Allen College who do research in that area. Each week, the class features a guest lecturer who selects the readings for the week and leads the discussion for the first two hours of the class. After seeing how exemplary Nassim's guest lecture was the first year, I moved her visit to early in the semester so that it would set the tone for the whole class. Nassim's topic has been the question of whether artifacts have politics, and the readings that she has assigned have been a well-conceived combination of canonical texts and interesting applications at the intersection of STS and her own field of Design. Her discussion leadership was masterful. She was able to meaningfully engage with the students, even in a large class of graduate students from diverse backgrounds whom she was meeting for the first time. Her enthusiasm was infectious, and she perfectly balanced seriousness with openness. Nassim pushed the students both to read the texts generously enough to see what insights they provided, and to critique with rigor. In the course wrap-up conversation this year, my students spontaneously named her visit as the highlight of the semester.

Nassim's research informs her teaching, and she clearly cares deeply about pedagogy and about her students. That care is palpable, and encourages her students to rise to her high expectations. I enthusiastically recommend her for the CETL/BP Junior Faculty Award.

Sincerely,



Anne Pollock, Associate Professor

Dear members of the selection committee,

Professor Nassim JafariNaimi is well loved by many students, and I feel incredibly honored to support her for the 2017 CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award. I have known Nassim since Spring 2013 when I was a B.S. Computational Media junior taking her Principles of Interaction Design class. With her advice, I decided to enroll in M.S. Digital Media, and with her influence, I thoroughly enjoyed my program. In those three years, I had taken three graduate classes and completed research work under Nassim. She served as my invaluable master's advisor and even now still offers me advice. Nassim's democratic leadership, innovative teaching, and student accessibility make me believe she is the best candidate for this award. Furthermore, her genuine love of nurturing students into mindful individuals make me firmly believe she goes above and beyond this award's criteria.

Many Georgia Tech classes complement practice with theory, yet Nassim structures these two poles in the most effective way I've encountered during my educational career. Nassim grounds classes in her research collaborations with service organizations. Because so much unfolds along the way, facilitating service learning takes courage. Much of the classes's impact would not occur without her strong, democratic leadership and her ability to guide students as events develop. Nassim's influence has shown me that the real world is messy and riddled with politics—yet rigid boundaries can be challenged. She cultivates her students' mastery of rhetoric so that we may have our voices heard and our visions realized. Through her service learning guidance, I have come out with a resounding sense of citizenship.

What's more, her palpable trust in her students' abilities to tackle wicked problems is a self-fulfilling prophecy. When our studio partnered with an autism support service, I told Nassim I really liked the problem space, and she suggested I draft an internship position. To my surprise the organization accepted. This sparked a two-year thesis journey where Nassim nurtured, challenged, and encouraged me every step of the way. Because I'm motivated to meet her high expectations, I'm able to accomplish more than I imagined. In turn, I know I can place complete trust in her. When administrative issues arose with my thesis, Nassim went beyond her role and spoke with several parties in and out of Georgia Tech for my sake. Time and time again, she has gone above and beyond for my best interest.

Nassim once said a teacher-student interaction should be a dialogue where she learns what students need of her just as much as they learn from her. I remember during an unproductive period in my thesis, I shared my self-doubt with Nassim. First, she complimented me on my perseverance—so often have I seen her focus on students' strengths rather than their weaknesses. She offered her own story of uncertainty during her first times teaching and added she's still learning—the thought of which struck me because she seems so natural at facilitating. Nassim was willing to make herself open, and that empathy was more valuable to me than any advice. While she always makes time for advising despite her busy schedule, Nassim's true accessibility comes from the kindness she offers her students.

Nassim teaches and lives by the philosophies she gifts. The design theories she imparts explore upholding human dignity, understanding experiences, questioning assumptions, and recognizing plural values. They inform how to regard others and oneself. After reading one of her papers, I asked what she meant when she wrote of practitioners' ability to serve "human life and living." She describes an elusive quality that's hard to capture, but easy to recognize: a provider who makes you feel significant—that your well-being matters not because you are a patient but a fellow human. I immediately understood because Nassim had merely described herself. Through her example, I've seen how I too may apply these principles to make sense of and act in the world.

I must have made it quite apparent that Nassim is my most influential role model. I strive to emulate her qualities of respect, empathy, and fairness. So much of what I'm writing now are realizations long overdue—much too late to record in CIOS feedbacks. I have talked to several undergraduates and graduates who have walked through Nassim's classes. Not a single one has expressed anything other than utmost appreciation for the experience. Knowing her selflessness, receiving the Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award would only enable her to further serve her students. It would not only be an honor for her, but an honor for Georgia Tech to have her accomplishments recognized.

Sincerely,  
Michelle Partogi  
M.S. Digital Media, 2016



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**Dear Selection Committee,**

I am writing this letter in great pleasure and respect for Nassim JafariNaimi to receive the CETL/ BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award. As one of Nassim's former students in LMC 3705 (Principles of Information Design), I had the pleasure of learning how to tackle design challenges and develop my skills as an industry-ready designer. Her class is what made me want to pursue design as a career, and I give my highest recommendations for Nassim's contributions toward improving design education at Georgia Tech.

One of the best examples of how Nassim interacts with her students is through her weekly in-class critique sessions, where we would present and analyze our class projects. I once thought it would be a headache to print and stitch together compositions for our drafts, but Nassim taught us to always put craft in our work and present our progress in the best way possible—allowing us to receive the highest quality of feedback. The critique sessions were nothing short of intense; Nassim would challenge us to view our classmates' work with an empathetic and critical eye. She introduced to us the color connotations, cultural norms, and accessibility issues that would affect the impact of our designs. While many professors hold off on critique until an assignment has been completed, Nassim encouraged us to show incremental and steady progress, to be honest about our struggles, and to shorten the feedback loop in the same way design agencies communicate with their clients frequently.

The projects Nassim had us pursue were immediately applicable to problems affecting people in the real world. I fondly remember the drive-thru redesign project, where we identified ways to make the experience of ordering food more accessible to people unlike ourselves. Nassim encouraged us to think about the kinds of users our designs would help and expected us to make decisions on behalf of them. When my final project teammate and I chose to visualize the under-resourced MARTA bus service in Metro Atlanta, Nassim exposed us to different methods of representing our information and pushed us to amplify the impact of our designs. Her advice was timely and relevant—she encouraged us to explore concepts for a physical installation (one that would fit the target audience better) to augment an online visualization. Both of those projects are on my portfolio website ([www.stephensong.com](http://www.stephensong.com)) and have since served as successful discussion topics in job interviews I've had.

In addition to the projects that developed the hard and tangible skills, Nassim taught us how to create environments conducive for collaboration. While most teachers would simply stand in the front of the classroom and lecture to their students, Nassim would have us move the tables into a circle so she could sit amongst us. She explained that the arrangement transforms the dynamic of the classroom into a collaborative & non-judgmental environment ideal for design. There was never a “professor versus student” tension where students are focused on passing a class—Nassim created a “class versus challenge” mentality where every one of us would work together to better understand design. Nassim never treated us like bored students who only want to pass a class and graduate. Nassim engaged with us like we are emerging professionals—genuinely eager to improve our work and deserving of respect as adults. The smallest details greatly affect the way we communicate, and Nassim pays attention to those small yet important things that make her impact so much broader.

I cannot stress enough how Nassim’s critique sessions and collaborative design environments have helped me solidify my passion to become a designer. While many professors lecture about design in the same way one would teach engineering, Nassim prioritizes the collaboration and empathy required for designers to succeed in real world projects. Through my personal career as an interaction and user experience designer for organizations and companies such as Startup Exchange, Design Club, and MailChimp, I often refer back to the critical thinking skills that Nassim had practiced with us. Her classes prepared me for the kinds of collaborative design processes that I do on a regular basis, and I wish there were more classes at Georgia Tech that do the same.

On behalf of my fellow students who have benefited from her classes, I can say that Nassim JafariNaimi is greatly deserving and qualified for recognition within Georgia Tech’s faculty. The way she cultivates a strong design culture in a school traditionally known for its strengths in engineering is what other Computational Media and LMC majors need to succeed as interdisciplinary professionals. I sincerely hope that her nomination for the CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award will allow her to continue impacting students’ lives and professional careers as greatly as she had enriched mine.

Sincerely,  
Stephen Song  
B.S. Computational Media



IBM



IBM



IBM



11 January 2017

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Rose Peng and I am writing this letter to recommend Nassim JafariNaimi for the CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award. Nassim is an outstanding professor who has a clear passion for teaching and a strong eye for design. From the time I took her *Intro to Interaction Design* course in the Fall of 2009 to the time I graduated with my master's in HCI Spring 2014, I can sincerely say Nassim is the one professor who has made the largest impact in both my educational and professional career.

Before taking Nassim's *Intro to Interaction Design* course, I was entering my junior year of my studies in Computational Media with a vague idea of what my career path would be. While in the course, I learned about the intricacies of information architecture and the process of user experience design, which opened up a whole world of possibilities. She opened my eyes to not just my creative potential, but also my career potential. I never forgot what I learned.

Nassim's class was formatted very differently from other courses I took at Georgia Tech; a structure that I felt allowed me to put her teachings into practice and best retain the material. The course was fast-paced and project-based, with each project followed by a critique session, not unlike the structure of a design school course. There were lectures, but they were interactive sessions in which she encouraged the class to ask questions and give examples. We worked in teams for each project, where I was able to build skills for creative collaboration that prepared me for my design career. Nassim would also personalize her critiques for each student based on their learning style. I remember whenever Nassim critiques my work, she always started with something that was done well and followed up with a suggestion for improvement. She was constantly enthusiastic and motivating, pushing us to be creative and to think outside of the box.

After graduating with my degree in Computational Media, I worked for two years but still sought knowledge in the fields of User Experience and Interaction Design. Nassim's course came to mind, and I returned to Georgia Tech for a Master's in Human Computer Interaction. Nassim, having remembered my work in her *Intro to Interaction Design* course, offered me an opportunity to join her Design and Social Interaction Studio for graduate research. With this research position I was entrusted with forming an interdisciplinary team to develop a Quantum Mechanics educational game, titled *Particle in a Box*, that went on to be presented at conferences and win awards in serious games. Finally, when it came time to choose a professor for my Master's thesis project, Nassim was my obvious choice. Throughout my research, Nassim would keep up-to-date with my progress and provide me with resources and support. She would not only ensure that I was on track but also push me further by providing positive reinforcement and encouragement. If I ever felt lost Nassim would give me confidence and direction during a one-on-one session, which she always made time for.

Now, even a year after my graduate studies I still consider Nassim to be more than the best professor I have ever had; she is a mentor, friend, and lifelong connection. I cannot think of a more deserving candidate for the CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award.

Sincerely,

**Rose Peng**

*UX Designer, IBM Private Cloud*

*Georgia Institute of Technology, CM '11, HCI '15*

To Whom It May Concern / CETL/BP Teaching Excellence Award Committee

It gives me great pleasure and delight to write this letter in support for Dr. Nassim JafariNaimi's nomination for the CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award, 2017.

I first met Dr. JafariNaimi in her LMC6311, (Visual Culture and Design) in the first week of Spring '14 semester. I vividly recall the way she began the class, spending the first 20-30 minutes in comprehending the visual aspects of a trivial line drawn on a blank sheet of paper. Her passion and exuberance immediately stood out; and little did I know that the course would grow to play a pivotal role in lending direction and shape to my research interests for the remainder of my graduate program. The coursework was diligently structured; the class readings and the discussion sessions that followed were profound, intense and highly reflective in nature. The meticulously chosen exercises and course projects perfectly augmented the readings. They not only improved my skill-set as a user interaction designer but also provided the intellectual curiosity to learn more and understand and reason design better. The course was unquestionably one of the highlights of my Georgia Tech program and credits to Dr. JafariNaimi for making it an informative, engaging and a rewarding one.

During Fall '14 and Spring '15, I worked with Dr. JafariNaimi on visual policy research initiative in collaboration with School of Public Policy, Georgia Tech and Marcus Autism Center. Her management skills in guiding the inter-disciplinary project were highly commendable. Her leadership provided a methodical approach and a good balance of creative exploration, deliberation, implementation, refinement and validation cycles for every aspect of the research. Her feedback and design critiques were greatly valued and were vital towards making the end artifact a successful one.

The characteristic that sets my experiences with Dr. JafariNaimi stand-out was her ability to understand, empathize and mentor students. She was quick to realize my strengths and weakness, and she precisely knew what I would need to mature as a designer. She was always approachable for a discussion, be it pertaining to research or class or even otherwise. Her constant motivation and continued encouragement even during rough patches of not-so-good work made me strive relentlessly to produce my best work.

My interactions and courses with Dr. JafariNaimi have left a profound impact on my academic program and beyond. Despite geographical distances, she continues to be one of my "go-to" person for design and career advice and I'm privileged to have her continued mentorship. It is not often that one finds people who can influence to the extent that Dr. JafariNaimi has. The values learned from her research, teaching, and mentoring continues to reflect and enhance me and my work every day. It's an honor to recommend her for the CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award and I wish her my very best.

Brighton Vino Jegarajan,

Senior User Experience Design, VMWare, Palo Alto (May '15 - Present)

Master's in Human Computer Interaction, Georgia Institute of Technology (Aug '13 - May '15)

Email: [me@brightonvino.com](mailto:me@brightonvino.com) | Web: [www.brightonvino.com](http://www.brightonvino.com)

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to recommend Dr. Nassim JafariNaimi for the CETL/BP Junior Faculty Teaching Excellence Award. I cannot think of an educator that is more worthy of this honor.

I had the privilege of attending a few courses with Dr. JafariNaimi during my undergraduate studies of Computational Media at the Georgia Institute of Technology in 2010. I can confidently and proudly say that Dr. JafariNaimi is an extremely dedicated, compassionate and intelligent educator that puts her student's best interests first and foremost.

My experiences of being in her course were so different than being in other courses within the same university. Dr. JafariNaimi paid very close attention to all of her students. The interaction I had with her as a student felt very personal because it was clear that she truly cared about your success. She knew everyone by name and took the time to get to know her students. She paid close attention to our work and progress and always reached out a hand to help us whenever we needed it. She was very critical of our work, which at first was intimidating, but it became very clear that her main interest was to make sure that we were successful and that we welcomed criticism as a way of improving ourselves and our work. She pushed us to thrive and excel and to make sure that we were aiming for our full potential. I feel that I have been humbled and that is something I carry with me in life.

She was always there for all of her students. She encouraged us to reach out to her in any way and proved to always be open and available when we needed her. She encouraged us to think outside the box, yet questioned and challenged us every step of the way. This helped us build great confidence in ourselves and our thinking. She strengthened our skills of working in a team setting and expressing our ideas through public speaking and writing. After having her as a professor, I feel that I am able to think critically and broadly about topics and express my thoughts and solutions clearly in multiple ways. This is a priceless skill that I utilize in my life daily. I no longer feel that my thoughts and ideas are only limited to what I might have considered "safe".

Since meeting Dr. JafariNaimi, I often find myself bringing her up when talking about my experiences and where I am in my career today. I truly believe she has made an impact in an invaluable way to my career and life. I am now employed as a Product Manager at a very reputable software company. I use the skills she taught me every day in my job – to challenge myself to come up with great ideas and solutions, and accept critique as a means to improve. I feel that I owe a part of my success to her.

I am truly honored to have had these experiences with Dr. Nassim JafariNaimi. She is genuinely a wonderful person and an extraordinary educator that has left her mark on my life. She truly deserves this award!

Please feel free to reach out to me at (678) 313-6620 or [hudaosman1@gmail.com](mailto:hudaosman1@gmail.com) if you would like to discuss further. I'd be more than happy to expand on my recommendation.

Thank you,  
Huda Osman  
BS, Computational Media, 2011